

Poetry Analysis: "i lik the bred"

MEREDITH FAULKNER · OCTOBER 14, 2019

I love words, and I also love memes. Image my joy when a poetry meme emerged, one you've almost certainly read by now:

i lik the bred
by Sam Garland AKA Poem_for_your_sprog

my name is Cow
and wen its nite,
or wen the moon
is shiyning brite,
and all the men
haf gon to bed -
i stay up late.

i lik the bred.

This poem is a response to [a redditor's story](#) about a health inspection violation in which a cow sneaked into an 18th-century style bakery and licked the bread. Poem_for_your_sprog summarized the story in this poem, sparking this bizarre and cute meme. I love this poem for its ridiculous story, use of internet-speak, and sheer simplicity. So what makes this poem work so well?

The form is iambic dimeter, meaning every line is made up of two iambs (unstressed syllable followed by a stress, like “surprise”). The rhyme scheme is xAxAxBxB so that the second and fourth lines rhyme, as well as the sixth and eighth. It isn’t really divided up into stanzas, but the last of the eight lines is separated from the rest.

This rhyme scheme is very familiar to English-speakers. English doesn’t have a whole lot of rhyming words, so only rhyming the even lines gives us a break for the other 50% of the poem. xAxA xBxB is traditional for a ballad poem—though those have a different metrical scheme—or children’s stories. It reminds us of Dr. Seuss and The Night Before Christmas. It is comforting and innocent and accessible. The meter is gentle, rocking, completely regular. There are no rude interruptions, not even the punchline. It isn’t until we look at the line breaks that there are any formal irregularities. The last line is given its own “stanza,” and the seventh line is the only odd-numbered line to end with punctuation, and a period, no less. (This is especially curious considering the places grammar would have dictated punctuation, but the poet chose not to use it: “its” and not “it is;” missing a necessary comma after the first line to prevent a run-on.) What with the stanza break in an otherwise-stichic poem and the full stop, the poem feels over. But we know from both the rhyme and the logic of the story that there has to be more. “i lik the bred” is unexpected and yet, inevitable. It is surprising and satisfying. “i lik the bred” has to happen, or we are left unfulfilled.

Poem_for_your_sprog focuses his poem on the temporal setting for the story and ignores many other elements that the original redditor gave. This is due in part to the perspective switch from the third-person narrator to the first-person Cow. Cow has no need to know about what kind of bakery it is. Cow is only concerned with uninterrupted bread-licking. Just as Cow must wait for nightfall, we, too must wait from the second line until the eighth for the real action of the story. Lines three through seven concern time and secrecy. The real gist of the poem is “I am a cow who licks bread at night,” but we wait through an extended (considering the length of the poem) description of time. Lines three through six function as an extended definition of “nite,” set up by the “or” of line three. Rather than functioning as an entirely separate option from night, the or clause is an extended appositive. This is Cow’s definition of night: shining moon and humans sleeping.

This poem is a compacted version of the story it describes. We wait and wait with a limited perspective until finally “i lik the bred.” Cow gets sustenance and playful naughtiness; we get formal completion and humor. The poem is the bread, and we are Cow.

In doing my research (yes, I research memes), I’ve found multiple people comparing this language to Chaucer, i.e., Middle English. However, if I were to read the poem as I would Middle English—disclaimer, I’m really freaking bad at pronouncing Middle English—it would get a little wonky. I believe that the dialect of the poem is a result of internet humor and Tumblr/Reddit lingo. Approaching the poem with a Chaucerian lens makes it more distant, further removing readers from the subject in a poem that is already bovine-centric. If we read the poem as internet speak—similar to birb or doge language—a foreign poem is suddenly accessible. There is a timelessness to the poem, 21st-century words describing a story that could have happened millennia ago. Where the first-person perspective and the drawn-out form transcend species, the language transcends time and place.

my name is Merf,
and i believe
that words are ment
for all to reed.
the internet
is were i rome.
i will not rest -

i bring the pome.



FACEBOOK



TWITTER

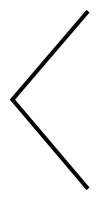


PINTEREST



0 LIKES

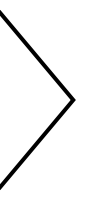
PREVIOUS



AN INTRODUCTION TO POETIC METER

POETRY

NEXT



POETRY ANALYSIS: "FLEAS"

POETRY

